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FM AMEMBASSY VIENTIANE
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 1156
INFO RUEHUL/AMEMBASSY SEOUL IMMEDIATE 0560
RUCNASE/ASEAN MEMBER COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO PRIORITY 1172
RHHMUNA/CDR USPACOM HONOLULU HI PRIORITY

S E C R E T VIENTIANE 000337

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DEPARTMENT FOR EAP/MLS
DEPARTMENT FOR EAP/K
DEPARTMENT FOR PRM
PACOM FOR POLAD

E.O. 12958: DECL: 04/25/2017

TAGS: PREF PHUM PGOV KN KS LA

SUBJECT: NORTH KOREAN CHILDREN IN SOUTH KOREAN EMBASSY
CUSTODY; SET TO DEPART APRIL 25

REF: VIENTIANE 329

Classified By: AMBASSADOR PATRICIA HASLACH. REASON: 1.4 B AND D.

¶1. (S) Summary: The South Korean Embassy confirmed that the three North Korean children who have been detained since November 2006 are in their custody and will leave Laos on the evening of April 25. It was the South Koreans, quiet efforts, rather than the NGO-generated flurry of publicity, that led to the children's release, though unfortunately NGOs are unlikely to draw this conclusion. End summary.

¶2. (S) The DCM called South Korean Counsellor Miyon Lee on April 25 to ask about press reports saying that the three North Korean children who had been in detention in Laos since November 2006 had been released into the custody of the South Korean Embassy. Ms. Lee replied, &We have them. We will send them this evening.⁸ She emphasized that this information should be kept secret. She said that she was going out of town and would provide us with further details after her return on April 30.

¶3. (S) Comment: The release of the children was the result of the South Korean Embassy's lengthy discussions with the Lao government, complicated by the Lao government's reluctance to incur the displeasure of the North Korean government, with which it also has close diplomatic relations. It occurred despite extensive publicity generated by a representative of a Japanese NGO, including stories in the Washington Post, International Herald Tribune, Sunday Times of London, and many other publications around the world. This attention may have delayed the children's release, which seemed imminent before the Lao New Year 14-16 holiday. However, the Japanese NGO and other North Korean refugee advocates are likely to conclude that it was their pressure that got the children released.

¶4. (S) Comment continued: The children's reported desire to resettle in the United States was another complicating factor in the case. Ms. Lee told us (Reftel) that the Lao had made it a condition of the children's release, presumably at the behest of the North Koreans, that they not be resettled in the United States. The arrival of well-meaning Korean-Americans who told the police that they wanted to take custody of the children could have been an additional complicating factor but fortunately does not seem to have caused a problem. (We did not hear from the group after the meeting discussed in Reftel.) Throughout the children's detention, Embassy Vientiane has kept in close touch with the South Korean Embassy but has not discussed the

case with the Lao government or become publicly involved. If we had, the children would probably still be in detention and facing the possibility of repatriation to North Korea. End comment.

HASLACH